

# HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION COMMUNICATE WITH CITIZENS?

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Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, with the assistance of the OPTEM network, organised the first stage of the “Horizon EU: European citizenship, a horizontal development” from 7 December 2013 to 3 January 2014 collecting opinion in discussion groups of 157 European citizens from 18 member states about their visions of the EU and their access to European institutions. This synthesis covers the main points of the second part of the discussion on the communication of the EU with the citizens.

## Introduction

157 citizens from 18 European Union member states (*see Map 1*) met in representative groups in order to discuss their visions of the EU and their access to the EU. Discussion groups were organised by the OPTEM network from 7 December 2013 to 3 January 2014 (*see Annex 1*).

They were chosen so as to establish a sample in which the diversity of European citizens is represented considering several socio-demographic criteria (*see Table 1*).

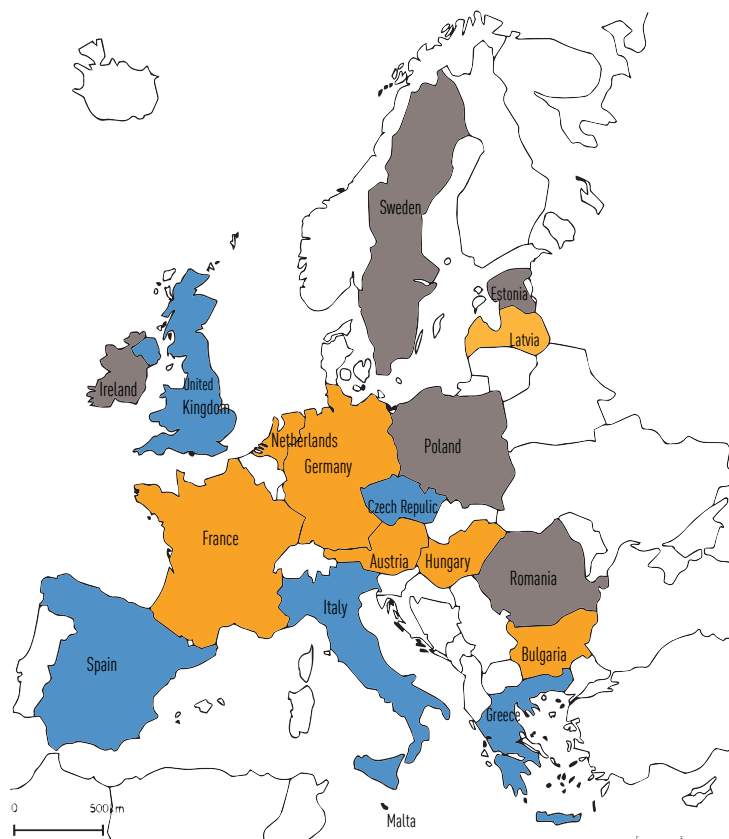
This synthesis covers the main points of the second part of discussion on the communication of the EU with the citizens. This text, written by Virginie Timmerman, is based on the elements from a European synthesis written by Daniel Debomy and the (18) national reports produced by the partners of the Optem network<sup>1</sup>. Opinions expressed here are only those of the participants in the discussion groups, and do not necessarily reflect those of the whole European citizens.

**TABLE 1** ► The profile of the 157 European citizens participating in the first stage of the “Horizon EU” project

Participants		157
Age range	20-34	52
	35-49	59
	50+	46
Socio-professional category	Low to middle	76
	Middle to upper	81
Gender	Male	80
	Female	77
Nationality		18

1. Daniel Debomy, “The involvement of EU citizens in the European project”, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014; Optem network, “European citizens’ involvement in the EU: national syntheses”, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014.

MAP 1 ► General attitude of citizens involved in the project “Horizon EU” vis-à-vis the EU



KEY ► Map 1

POSITIVE	MIXED (BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDES)	NEGATIVE
Estonia	Austria	Czech Republic
Ireland	Bulgaria	Greece (major disappointment)
Malta	France (deterioration)	Italy (disillusion and resentment)
Poland	Germany (deterioration)	Spain
Romania (moderation)	Hungary	United Kingdom
Sweden (partially offset)	Netherlands	
	Latvia (initial fear substantially reduced)	

## 1. How do citizens express their views regarding the EU?

The group discussion participants were invited to say how they could currently, as citizens, “give their opinion and make their voices heard as regards the future directions of the European Union - whether to approve or disapprove such or such a direction, or for any other reason”.

This question is not an easy one to answer, it surprises or even disconcerts many interviewees.

This has been seen more or less in all of the countries included in this study.

After consideration, participants recognise several means of expression which can be divided into four categories (see Figure 1). While they often give several examples, the first ones are always the same: voting, contacting representatives at European and/or national institutions, or nothing (see Map 2).

MAP 2 ► Means of expressing opinions for citizens, mentioned spontaneously by participants in “Horizon EU” project discussion groups

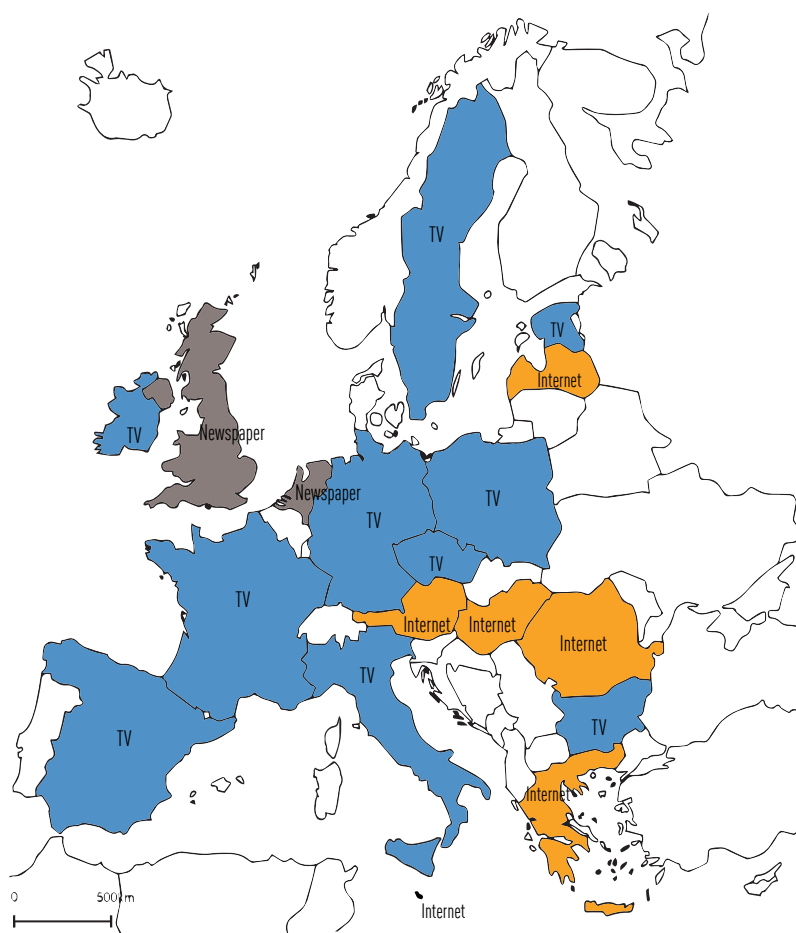
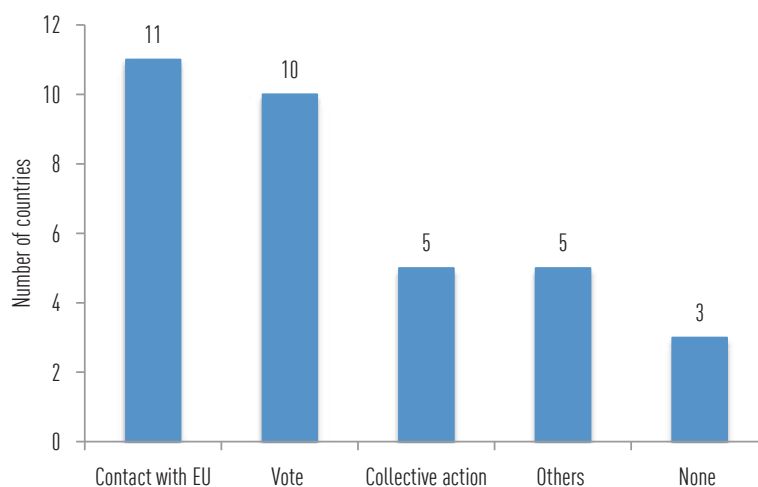


FIGURE 1 ► Means of expressing opinions on the EU, cited in “Horizon EU” project discussion groups



Within 11 countries<sup>2</sup>, citizens allude **trying to contact EU institutions or officials in these institutions** as a mean of expression: possibility of meetings with MEPs or other officials; visiting a representation office; sending letters or e-mails; (more occasionally mentioned) responding to consultations that may organise national governments or European institutions, and questioning the national government.

These potential means of contact are mainly mentioned by interviewees from small member states – in which the visibility of bodies or representatives affected is probably not as bad as in larger countries.

### Citizens’ voices

*“Of course you can write to the Commission or the Parliament, but given the overall size of Europe, a single person can only do very little to change things” Austrian citizen*

*“The EU reply to letters but this reply may come in three months. And the answers are always evasive. They answer in general but the answer comes from a secretary who tells you that you are generally right, but you have national legislation, so check it. I’ve sent post letters. They always answer but...” Bulgarian citizen*

*“With their high salaries they are reluctant to look at what is happening here” Bulgarian citizen*

*“I sometimes send emails to members of the Dutch Parliament and always get an answer. That gives me the feeling of being heard” Dutch citizen*

*“If I had an idea that something should be done differently, and I would write a letter and send it by mail, I wonder if it would really reach anybody” Hungarian citizen*

*“I visited the EU site like 8 years ago, and wrote a letter demanding transparency in every sense, and I’m still waiting” Spanish citizen*

In 10 countries<sup>3</sup>, citizens mention **voting** as a mean of citizen expression whether it is for the European parliamentary elections or national elections (depending on the position of party candidates on Europe), or in referendums in some countries.

Though, voting does not immediately spring to everyone’s mind as a means of expression of citizens’ expectations regarding the European Union. Countries hit the hardest by the economic and financial crisis, which have received active support from European institutions, as well as a few new member states, do not mention it at all<sup>4</sup>. Inversely, in Germany and France, it is one of the only – when not the only – means of citizen expression which is discussed.

2. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland.

3. Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, UK.

4. Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Spain.

## Citizens' voices

*"Civic participation is limited to European Parliament elections, and the European Parliament is not the most powerful of all organisations" Austrian citizen*

*"(In the European elections) one should talk about Europe, projects to be launched (so as to prevent the election from turning into a "punishment vote")" French citizen*

*"Concrete policies, straightforward speech, in order to get basic people interested... Our preoccupations are actually remote for the decision makers" French citizen*

*"Once the election is over, they do not really listen any longer.... Not because they do not want to, but they are no longer able to do it, they have lost contact" French citizen*

*"I think the last elections were 2 years ago, so the next ones should be in 3 years" German citizen*

*"We don't really have the impression that the votes matter" German citizen*

*"Anyhow, at the last election, no party suited me and now we have a coalition of 3 parties in the same boat, we don't know in what direction they're going to sail!" German citizen*

*"It's the same at European level. Germany sends its MPs, the other countries send their own and then let's see if they can collaborate" German citizen*

*"It will always be difficult. The countries' interests are too different" German citizen*

*"The elections would be a good way of getting one's voice heard but, firstly the turnout is very low, and then you have a feeling that the parties send to Brussels the old timers whom nobody wants here anymore" German citizen*

*"We are not in a direct democracy, so what do we really make decisions about?" German citizen*

*"Generally speaking, the people have little decision power in Germany. In other countries, the referendum is widely used" German citizen*

*"We should be able to decide by referendum on enlargements for example" German citizen*

*"The people should be able to decide on questions which really matter to everyone" German citizen*

*"Personally, I rather see the danger of a referendum. Let us take Greece again: let us imagine a referendum in which the Germans had refused to help. What would have happened? Perhaps everything would have exploded" German citizen*

*"The priority would be to create a feeling of general interest prevailing above each nation's particular interests" German citizen*

*"When someone went out there, we could hear for some time what they did there, but now we get less information. It would be really good to know who did what on our behalf" Hungarian citizen*

*"We elect them, but then they don't give a shit. I don't feel that I am important to those who we voted for. So I don't think it is important to vote. But this should not be the proper way in democracy, where it would be important to know that my vote carries some value" Hungarian citizen*

*"An opinion shared by a whole group does matter. If I say now that I don't want Britain to be part of the EU anymore, maybe nobody will pay attention to me, but if there is ten of us, then someone might hear us, and if we all go out on the street... Maybe nothing will happen right away, but you get to be heard..." Romanian citizen*

In five countries<sup>5</sup>, citizens in the discussion groups mention **collective channels**: public protests and petitions. Citizens view petitions as something requiring support from civil society.

## Citizens' voices

*"I go to protest in front of the G8, just as it is done by a few people" Hungarian citizen*

*"If you are alone, of course, nobody would listen to you, yet if there would be a letter with 50,000 - 100,000 signatures, they will take that into account and possibly the expected result would be achieved" Latvian citizen*

5. Austria, France, Hungary, Latvia, Malta.

*“The legal way is often the most inefficient way. Extreme actions more promptly and efficiently draw public attention to issues that might be legal yet incorrect” Latvian citizen*

**Other means of citizen expression** were mentioned in five discussion groups<sup>6</sup>: attracting media attention - particularly television; having connections - knowing people with important positions in European institutions; running as a candidate in European elections and, lastly, bringing cases before international courts.

### Citizens’ voices

*“Know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody” Estonian citizen*

*“I definitely need a tool to grab their attention. So I have to make myself heard, e.g. in a TV programme” Hungarian citizen*

*“If I really want to highlight something, I would contact the media. A TV channel, where I could try to draw the attention in form of a report” Hungarian citizen*

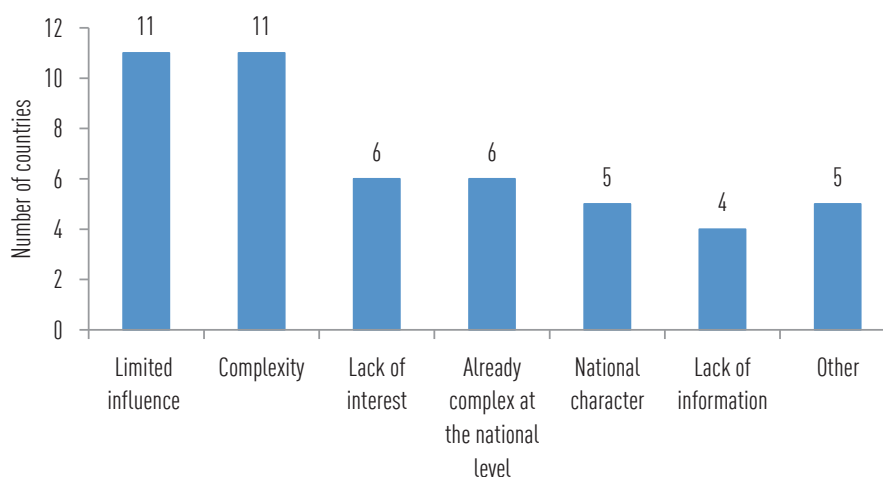
*“It should go into the news. Then the politician will have to deal with it” Hungarian citizen*

Citizens in three member states **did not quote any means of expression for citizens**. First in Spain and Greece, two southern European countries where resentment towards the EU has grown and where people interviewed tend to believe they have no access to decision making or any influence anyway. It is also the case, in Romania, where citizens have little confidence in their national institutions and representatives.

## 2. What obstacles stand in the way of citizen expression?

Despite the range of means suggested, citizens are not satisfied. For the most part, they find it more theoretical than anything else. Few say they have actually tried to use them. Citizens give several examples of obstacles to express their views and have them taken into account - obstacles which are perceived as significant and often discouraging. Several types of obstacles are mentioned (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2** ▶ Obstacles to European citizens’ expression cited in “Horizon EU” project discussion groups



6. Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Sweden.

Many of those interviewed admitted that citizens – themselves included – are passive on this subject. Several factors contribute to this passivity.

Firstly, **the presumed lack of willingness by the institutions and representatives concerned to listen to the citizens and take their opinions into account**, and the corollary doubts that “it could do any good” to try turning towards them. This idea is present in a majority of the countries examined<sup>7</sup>, with varying degrees of force, and it should be noted that **the interviewees make this point about bodies and political representatives in general, at both national and European level**. Also, the impression of the **minimal influence their country and its representatives have** in the bodies of the Union may add to the problem.

**A vague and often quite negative image of the MEPs**: mostly unknown, regarded by some people as not representative; sometimes perceived as “second-class” politicians; who are anyway “out of touch” with the life of the average citizens and don’t report to them once elected.

Also often suggested<sup>8</sup> is **the specific difficulty in understanding the complex European policy issues**. At a practical level, the lack of knowledge in places or the channels used to address a European Union – in other words, **tools of citizen expression** – regarded as immense and remote. This complexity is perceived at both the European and **national level**<sup>9</sup> and strongly dissuades citizens from expressing their views.

Some citizens also explained that this occurs due to a **lack of interest** in European issues<sup>10</sup>; certain national characteristics<sup>11</sup> such as the timidity of Estonians, for example; a **lack of information**<sup>12</sup>, and, lastly, some cited a lack of confidence in national institutions and tools which leave them unsatisfied, particularly in comparison to the influence wielded by lobby groups<sup>13</sup>.

However, **expectations of greater involvement** exist in groups who met in the various countries

studied. Some of the remarks made highlight several key ideas. Citizens sense a need for closer proximity: meeting with officials in nearby places (town hall, local district meetings, information offices open to the public...). They wish that European institutions and their representatives use more frequently new technological tools for communication: Internet and the related new tools such as social networks, making it possible to consult the citizens, to collect their views, to receive petitions, to organize debates, etc. (even if these could be complemented by more classical methods). Lastly, they demand stronger interactivity and exchanges, in using these various means of contact.

### Citizens’ voices

- Limited influence of the citizens

*“Only organised interest groups have a chance in the EU; the citizens also need to pool their interests” Austrian citizen*

*“The problem is that organised interest groups are present in a number of areas in the EU, and in many cases it is not obvious in how far they also represent the citizens’ interests” Austrian citizen*

*“Quite often I have the feeling that the citizens’ concerns are not what matters primarily” Austrian citizen*

*“Certainly there are ways to participate in the discussion but the question is always: does it actually have an impact on anything” Austrian citizen*

*“But maybe it’s justified that we as average citizens can’t just interfere in EU matters. We are just a little part in the whole body...” Austrian citizen*

*“Well there is no audibility at any level. We can’t be heard in Bulgaria, not to mention Europe hearing us” Bulgarian citizen*

*“We are not represented by our members. They represent themselves. They just account business trips, flights and that is it” Bulgarian citizen*

*“The influence of one person cannot be measured” Dutch citizen*

7. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Spain.

8. Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, UK.

9. Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Romania.

10. Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Poland.

11. Estonia, Greece, Poland, Sweden.

12. Austria, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands.

13. Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Ireland.

*"I am not optimistic at all. I do not think I can affect top-level decisions by expressing my opinion" Greek citizen*

*"If you email your TD [Member of the Irish Parliament] here, if there is a topical issue you will get like an automated response type of thing that goes out to everyone. So it'll just be the same you know" Irish citizen*

*"Wait until election time and then they'll try to help you" Irish citizen*

*"You're never going to get your voice heard on a sole level, you need to be involved in, or be part of, a lobby group" Irish citizen*

*"I don't really think people feel it would be effective. Whether they do it or not, it doesn't make a difference. The general opinion is that they will do whatever they want. But it will end someday. It will end. It is also temporary when I feel like a rebel and then I think - I won't go, I won't say anything because it is useless" Polish citizen*

*"Our opinion does not count; it does not influence the decisions. How can an opinion influence them? Nothing happens" Romanian citizen*

*"It is beyond us. It is not in our hands" Spanish citizen*

*"What saddens me, is that it is all a lie - you have no say in it" Spanish citizen*

- European, and sometimes national, complexity and bureaucracy

*"As I said before: this is also a matter of time. If I wanted to be properly informed I would have to spend hours with it" Austrian citizen*

*"We should be able to influence the institutions' actions but we cannot figure out how to do it" Bulgarian citizen*

*"I cannot judge the economy, so I don't use that when deciding. On a professional level I have more knowledge and take that into consideration" Dutch citizen*

*"I think you would have to be seen to exhaust all the avenues of resource in this country before you start [asking for EU's help]..." Irish citizen*

*"We don't want to do anything ourselves, that is the entire problem. We do not communicate even with local municipality structures, deputies, not speaking about the EU institutions" Latvian citizen*

*"We have no access to make decisions on any rules. I don't know how many signatures are required on certain topics" Spanish citizen*

*"I would like to have a more direct way to access European funds, not to depend on the intermediary bureaucracy. I would like to go directly to the EU for support" Romanian citizen*

- Lack of interest for European affairs

*"If people are not interested in the EU, they simply don't use their options, no matter how many possibilities the EU would offer" Austrian citizen*

*"I agree that the main problem is disinterest and indifference" Austrian citizen*

*"It's just the same situation as in Austria" Austrian citizen*

*"My vote for Europe is what I want for the country, not for Europe as a unity" Dutch citizen*

*"I don't intend to have any kind contribution; I don't wish to get involved now. Maybe in a few years, I shall wish to do that, but now I don't sit and check my e-mail to see what I've received from the EU" Romanian citizen*

*"I don't think that future is too bright for Romania. I am pessimistic" Romanian citizen*

- National character

*"Estonians are too shy" Estonian citizen*

*"They grumble a lot they do not take a lot of action" Maltese citizen*

*"Poles are too passive. I am trying to be active. But I think Poles are passive about it, because they express their views only in the march during the Independence Day. And this is just once a year" Polish citizen*



“For example, I have a girlfriend living in Paris, and mobilizations over there are being different. They are paid more attention” Spanish citizen

- Lack of (relevant) information

“For instance, on the issues of Syria and Serbia Greece had a stand-alone approach and this was promoted through national media. I never came to listen to actual EU arguments, only their criticism” Greek citizen

- Will of greater involvement from citizens

“Creating an organisation that would work on the many subjects related to Europe, perhaps on a regional level... Perhaps it could start from circles at a very basic level from which the thoughts expressed would gradually move up...” French citizen

“I tried to apply for European funds with a project on Nazism and Fascism, but I was unsuccessful. This seems to me to be an important topic” Romanian citizen

“I would want a communication strategy that would be closer to people, through offices and centres, but face-to-face” Romanian citizen

“I believe in action and that is why I am trying to do something” Romanian citizen

“I don't feel like I have contributed so far by doing something or expressing my opinion, but I would wish to do so and I think I could do it. I could express my opinion loud and clear and, even if I would be on my own at the beginning, things could develop and I could build a community that would be concerned about the same issues. I could get involved in this way” Romanian citizen

“I have noticed that this tendency to get involved in how our society functions is increasingly stronger, at least here in Romania. The University Square is full with people who want to defend their point of view...” Romanian citizen

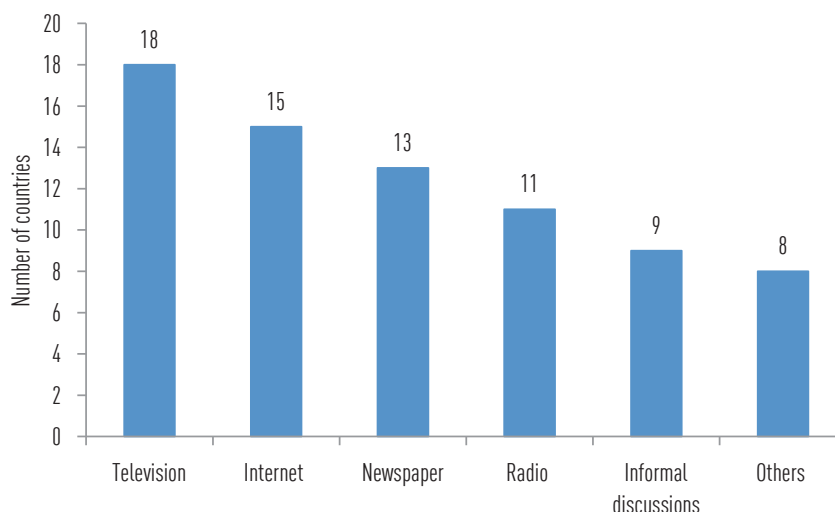
### 3. How do citizens obtain information about the EU?

In the various discussion groups, participants cited a lack of information and the complexity of European affairs as obstacles to express their views as citizens.

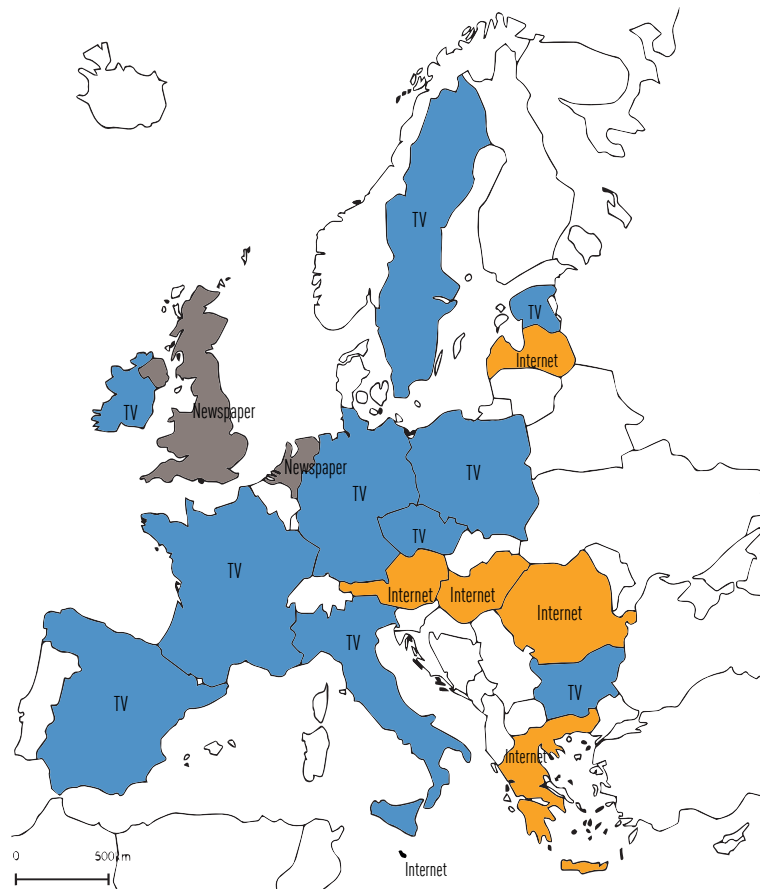
Thus, people in the discussion groups were asked about their **sources of information and opinions on the European Union** - taking sources in the broad sense, including conversations with friends and acquaintances as well as more formal sources.

In the majority of countries, traditional media - television and newspapers - are quoted first, whereas

FIGURE 3 ► Sources of information about the EU cited in discussion groups for the “Horizon EU” project



MAP 3 ► First sources of information cited by citizens participating in the “Horizon EU” project



in the other countries, internet is the first source of information about the EU (see Map 3).

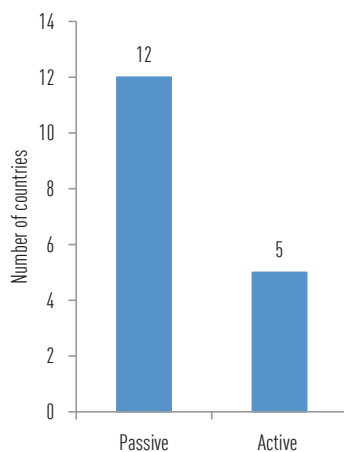
Sources of information about the EU cited by citizens in all member states (see Figure 3) are related to mass media.

**It is true that in the majority of cases the citizens interviewed admit to being passive,** waiting

for the information to be fed to them, and not really inclined to make the effort to go look for it - on subjects that are complex and that, in general, do not have any direct impact on their own lives, and are even off-putting. As a result, the information they receive about the EU comes from mass media.

Our Irish, Estonian, Latvian, Romanian and Maltese interviewees, however, appear to be relative

FIGURE 4 ► Seeking out information about the EU, as discussed by “Horizon EU” project groups



exceptions, in that they look for information more actively and they consult several sources.

### Citizens' voices

*"We have other things in our mind... We strive to survive nowadays, getting informed on the EU is a luxury"* Greek citizen

As expected, **traditional media - television, newspaper, radio** - are mentioned in all member states, though in varying degrees. In many countries, they are the main source of information for most of the citizens questioned. It is the case almost everywhere in the old member states included in the scope of this study. It is also true in the Czech Republic.

Among the traditional media, we note the domination of television over the other types of media in one out of two countries (Germany, France, Greece, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania), whereas its use is more balanced - especially with use of the print media - in the other countries.

As for radio, we hear reference to it relatively often in France, Italy, Ireland, Sweden, Czech Republic and Hungary, less so in Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria and Latvia, and hardly at all elsewhere.

### Citizens' voices

- Television

*"The problem with the media is that you should watch several channels. If you watch RTL or SAT 1, they are slating the European Union, if you switch over to information channels like NTV or BBC, it is much more objective. They do not only give negative news, they also talk about projects being developed"* German citizen

*"The only reason a privately owned TV channel is willing to offer further information on the EU is only if the owner has some tangible benefits out of it"* Greek citizen

*"The most important one is television, mainly Romanian TV stations"* Romanian citizen

*"I choose TV as a source. At the office, we talk whenever some important news comes up. Newspapers*

*- rarely, mainly when using the metro. I also listen to the radio, to the news from the national radio station"* Romanian citizen

*"I like to hear different opinions, but then I filter them. I do realize whether they are well-intended or not"* Romanian citizen

*"I hear more EU-related news on Channel 1 and 2, more than on the private channels. That's my feeling"* Spanish citizen

- Newspaper

*"It will never be possible for me to read unbiased press"* Hungarian citizen

*"In the paper La Razón, if there is any Government-related EU news, it is always presented slightly better than maybe in El País"* Spanish citizen

- Radio

*"Many people listen to the radio 24 hours a day, even at the office"* German citizen

In most of the new member states where the study was conducted (more or less all with the exception of the Czech Republic) the **Internet** is mentioned more, it is often on a par with traditional media, if not more widely used, and the respondents often give particulars about various ways of using it. Most often, then, citizens who use Internet to obtain information consult the web sites of national newspapers. Search engines and social media are also mentioned.

On the contrary, the Internet is barely mentioned in some groups or only by a minority of those interviewed, younger people or those well used to it because of their educational background or their jobs, who mention it. The participants of the Spanish, the Irish and even more so the Austrian groups, refer more often to the Internet as a source (or a means of access) they use regularly.

The **official web sites of European institutions**<sup>14</sup> are sometimes mentioned but citizens admit to rarely visit these sites due to their complexity and lack of visibility.

### Citizens' voices

14. Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania.

- The different uses of Internet

*“When I go to bed or wake up, I check nu.nl on my mobile” Dutch citizen*

*“There must be quite a lot of information on the web. I heard about software patenting, following the American model... vaguely heard about it on the Internet” French citizen*

*“Speaking about friends. I also meant the Internet. Linking to news is popular among young people now. It’s good to send a link from time to time. Send to your good friends. Or make an intelligent comment. So I mean Facebook. And it also includes the EU” Polish citizen*

*“As sources – the Internet and my folks back home, who talk [about these things]” Romanian citizen*

*“I prefer the Internet, where the information flows... You only have to look for it” Romanian citizen*

*“For me, the Internet is crucial, mainly websites that post analyses; an analysis – this is what I like to read. I like to read an educated opinion and I usually read pro-EU websites, for this is my stance as well, I am pro-EU” Romanian citizen*

*“There is a website where information is available like in 16 languages, but when you go to the information as such, it is only English, French and German. I think this is awful” Spanish citizen*

- Visits on the European institutions’ official websites

*“I frequently visit the site of the European Parliament, due to work... I need to be up to date on new programmes and funding but, other than that, I am not interested much” Greek citizen*

*“I was interested by the existing public consultations, it is not difficult to access the info, but it is difficult to translate them into one’s own economic reality; we find ourselves forced to suffer the decisions taken” Italian citizen*

*“The Internet – there is the European Union’s website, which I visit. I also had a unit at the university on the EU. You also have Wikipedia, where you can find out general things” Romanian citizen*

Among the **other sources** that the interviewees mention, we find these from time to time: school (or university or Erasmus exchange) by young people; specialised sources – consulted for professional reasons; more often, “word of mouth” – or “personal experience” from trips, meeting with other Europeans, or else observation of the local impact of EU measures.

### Citizens’ voices

- Conversations with family and friends

*“I know from my foreign relations that some topics are presented differently in their country” Austrian citizen*

*“We talk a lot about EU-related topics with friends and acquaintances” Bulgarian citizen*

*“I think it’s a good thing to get to know people from other countries in the EU who talk about the situation in their country in a personal conversation” Bulgarian citizen*

*“The problem is that you must keep informed on a permanent basis, otherwise you forget. As far as I am concerned, my information source is my boyfriend. Because I find it boring on the Internet whereas I can ask my boyfriend stupid questions” German citizen*

*“She (daughter) was learning all about the countries in the European Union and that, I would often press on the Internet to find out more about it” Irish citizen*

*“My friend, who is a journalist, posts some news on Facebook, and all his friends read it, see what’s going on and comment” Polish citizen*

*“My partner tells me all about it. I’m not really interested” Spanish citizen*

*“In the work canteen we talk about these topics” Spanish citizen*

## 4. Do citizens feel well-informed?

The quality and credibility of the media are often seen in bad or even very bad light. On the whole, few people have the feeling of being well or reasonably well informed about the European Union – and even

fewer think they have a coherent overview of what is and what does the Union.

Quite a **general criticism of the mass media** of all types can be noted in Germany, in France, in Italy, in Greece, in Austria, in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Latvia, Bulgaria (less vociferously) and Malta. **There is more varied criticism depending on the media:** in Sweden (quality channels and newspapers against popular or populist television and press); in Poland (criticism primarily of television channels); in the Czech Republic (public radio and television appreciated, as well as economic magazines, and the opposite for their private counterparts); in Estonia (the same appreciation of public channels, the opposite point of view about most newspapers); in Romania (criticism, though moderate, of television). On the other hand, there is rarely positive appreciation: in Ireland (subjects related to the European Union quite well covered generally); and comparatively few criticisms, overall, in Spain.

Austrian, Italian and Dutch citizens mention information obtained or sought out via **foreign media**, viewed as better.

The reasons given for dissatisfaction are the following: the impression that there is **little coverage** of European topics, that the coverage is **biased**, that the news is “filtered” through the political preferences of journalists or the political leaning of the publication, the **mediocre quality** of the coverage of these topics, or the tendency to seek out sensationalism and only showing an interest in what is “negative” in the European Union. Furthermore, information about the EU, which often is already about complex subjects, is **fragmented and/or partial**. The opposite case may be noted, that of Latvia, where the media are criticised for their “double-talk” which means that they often “paint a rosy picture of the European Union”.

### Citizens’ voices

- Medias’ credibility

*“In my opinion, the Austrian print media are equally bad” Austrian citizen*

*“I mostly follow up the information I need from media – television, radio stations but always double-check with internet. I usually go to the Europa site. The last*

*time I was furious about the sugar and flushing cisterns volume directives made up by euro clerks – they only allow 3 litter volumes of flushing cisterns for toilets” Bulgarian citizen*

*“To me it is not trustworthy at all. It is especially determined by what lobbyists from companies do. News always shows the positive aspects and not what is really behind it” Dutch citizen*

*“If you have any doubt in your head too, there is always other avenues that you can start exploring anyway you know” Irish citizen*

*“Internet is crucial, especially for those who want to pick out the information they receive. With television, you get what they give you” Romanian citizen*

*“I prefer the Internet, because television does not offer me credible information anymore. I cannot say that I use certain sites – the information is just there, and you only have to look for it” Romanian citizen*

- Filtered information

*“A lot of information is filtered by the media and thus never revealed to the public. Information is partly filtered by the media itself, and partly by certain political organisations which only allow targeted information to be published” Austrian citizen*

*“The media story about the EU focuses on its bad points. We don’t get to hear anything good. The bad points make better stories – like the straight bananas one” British citizen*

*“They just open their mouths and talk rubbish. They are all on the gravy train” British citizen*

*“Sometimes I see something from Brussels, but that is mainly when we have to pay or when we get money” Dutch citizen*

*“The media mainly tells you what goes wrong” French citizen*

*“I think a better information policy should be designed. The media and the government tend to conceal a lot of things because nowadays the majority of laws are made in Brussels and the governments are scared to confess that they have delegated, that is, lost, their power” German citizen*

*"No one trusts anyone" Hungarian citizen*

*"All the news channels always have information on it you know and they will talk about the situation for Merkel and her problems there and how she had to sell the idea to her people first. So if we didn't know about that they'll tell you. Now some of that could be propaganda as well, that's another way of looking at the thing, because they are politicians at the end of the day" Irish citizen*

*"There would be a certain amount of spin depending on who's reporting on it. It suits a certain agenda it's going to be put out there with a certain tilt to it to suit that, whoever is giving it out you know" Irish citizen*

- Foreign media coverage

*"The best thing you can do is read newspapers from different countries so as to make up your own mind and to receive information from different perspectives; however, this is also a matter of time" Austrian citizen*

*"I hardly ever consume domestic media sources as they distort our perception of the world due to a rather Austrian-point-of-view-reporting on the EU" Austrian citizen*

*"In addition, I read German newspapers like the FAZ or Die Zeit" Austrian citizen*

*"I enjoy English media in general, especially in the context of Europe, as they focus on totally different topics than we do" Austrian citizen*

*"The ORF is a disaster; they simply report what they want" Austrian citizen*

*"The German media are better in this respect and also more neutral in their reporting, it seems" Austrian citizen*

*"I read a French paper every now and then." Dutch citizen*

*"I read the Volkskrant and NRC and watch also RTL news. That is a good balance. I also get information in my work from the Dutch government" Dutch citizen*

*"The foreign press talks a lot about the European Union matters, on the contrary the Italian papers do not deal with them at all" Italian citizen*

- European news : poorly covered and fragmented

*"In my opinion, EU-related topics are hardly ever covered because our media mainly focuses on the rather boring Austrian politics of the day" Austrian citizen*

*"There must be information somewhere, but not really in the (major) media..." French citizen*

*"Perhaps on more or less specialized channels" French citizen*

*"You do not know where to start from" Greek citizen*

- The complexity of the EU

*"It is difficult because most people are not interested in the EU" Bulgarian citizen*

*"The individual is just not interested in this abundance of information. I'd rather go for a walk than read about a certain issue on the ORF website for three hours and in the end not get to know the entire story" Bulgarian citizen*

*"It is a very complex topic. It's not possible to just sum it up in a few words" Bulgarian citizen*

*"If you don't keep up to date all the time and happen to miss out on some information, it is difficult to get back on track. Also, I am sure it's not so easy to transfer information on this topic in a way that everybody really wants to be up to date" Bulgarian citizen*

*"When I am trying to find subsidies for my scientific work it is very hard to find. We need a specialised company to find that for us" Dutch citizen*

*"We know about it when a decision is taken, but we hear nothing before it is... so we just apply it, that's all" French citizen*

*"There are so many subsidies for things that do not deserve it. In Romania, someone received a subsidy to create a farm with 1.800 cows which existed only in Farmville on Facebook. Now they are going to court on the ground that it was not stipulated that the cows should be real!" German citizen*

*"I do not know the eligibility criteria, and the media do not tell us about them. All of a sudden we are wondering what they are. It should be explained to the European citizens"* German citizen

*"It's so dominant in the national media now you know. There is big coverage on RTE and the Irish Times, when it was saying about the elections and stuff like that, and what it means for us etc. You see Western European countries about the recession in Europe as well so it's constantly in your face"* Irish citizen

*"It is complicated also for the insiders, I tried to understand how do the European subsidies work, on the television they all fill their mouth by talking about European Union, but things are quite unclear"* Italian citizen

In order to better use the various means of expression at their disposal and to do so more often, **a large part of the citizens taking part to the group discussions would like to be better informed**. Thus, they suggest several solutions regarding how information gets to them and the content of this information<sup>15</sup>. In terms of form, participants expressed an interest in a transnational channel which would not be influenced by national points of view. In terms of content, they would like to know more about concrete subjects that affect their daily lives and about immigration, the environment, etc.

### Citizens' voices

- Citizens' suggestions

*"Information we should receive twice a year in our letter box. Nobody will say: well, what about ordering a brochure"* German citizen

*"It should start at school, but in an attractive way. I can see my goddaughter who is 15, she only has Justin Timberlake in mind, I do not think she is interested in politics"* German citizen

*"On Phoenix there is a history programme that I like because it is done in a modern, very lively manner, with testimonies. Something of that kind should be done on the European Union. The history of the EU, nobody knows it. People only know what they hear*

*from one day to the next and in general it is negative"* German citizen

*"They could set up a sort of political talk show, a news programme presented by a well known character; Stephan Raab for example, he was involved in the parliamentary election campaign, he is someone who appeals to young people. Or Kaya Yanar for instance, you can be sure that people would remember what he has said"* German citizen

*"They could produce clips, 'The EU in 100 seconds'. RTL does it with the Bible, why not with the EU"* German citizen

*"Something which should be both educational and amusing. Like in 'Sendung mit der Maus'"* German citizen

*"It should not be up to me to go and inquire, but they themselves should send me the information based on my business sector"* Italian citizen

- Issues on which citizens would like to be better informed

*"It would be interesting to understand, for instance, whether the Belgians pay to us or we pay to them. And how large is this payment"* Latvian citizen

*"I would like to know how far a new law might involve a change or non-change for me and my life"* Austrian citizen

*"I would be interested in scientific research. There is a fund called European Science Foundation. Unfortunately, they give money only for very ambitious projects, involving many people"* Romanian citizen

*"I would be interested in taxes. Some of them are imposed by the EU, but others are imposed by our authorities and are too high"* Romanian citizen

*"I would be interested in protecting heritage sites. There are many valuable sites. It is about protecting monuments and restoring their old charm. Some of them are not monuments anymore, but ruins. I would like the EU to create a programme on that issue, because this heritage is part of our Union's identity"* Romanian citizen

<sup>15</sup> Virginie Timmerman, "How do citizens see the European Union?", *Synthesis*, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014.

*“I would like to do something related to agriculture, together with my father, because in my area (Bistrita) there are many unexploited fields. I feel very sorry for those lands” Romanian citizen*



**ANNEX 1** ► Calendar of discussions organised by the OPTEM network during stage 1 of the “Horizon EU” project

Calendar	PLACE OF DISCUSSION GROUP	OPTEM, EUROPEAN QUALITATIVE NETWORK
7 December 2013	Tallinn (Estonia)	SariPoll
10 December 2013	Sofia (Bulgaria)	Alpha Research Ltd
	Lille (France)	OPTEM worked in cooperation with Inter View Partners
11 December 2013	Athens (Greece)	Focus Bari
	Dublin (Ireland)	Behaviour & Attitudes
	La Valette (Malta)	MISCO International Limited
	Amsterdam (Netherlands)	True Research
12 December 2013	Bucharest (Romania)	Data Media Ltd
13 December 2013	Cologne (Germany)	Echanges Marktforschung in relation with Psyma
16 December 2013	Budapest (Hungary)	Psyma Hungary
	Milan (Italy)	Periscope
17 December 2013	Vienna (Austria)	Karmasin Motivforschung
18 December 2013	Warsaw (Poland)	BSM
	Madrid (Spain)	Psyma Ibérica Marketing Research
	London (UK)	AIMR
19 December 2013	Prague (Czech Republic)	Mareco, s.r.o
	Stockholm (Sweden)	Kommunicera
3 January 2014	Riga (Latvia)	Latvian Facts

WHAT DO CITIZENS THINK THE FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE EU ARE?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW WOULD CITIZENS LIKE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman and Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2014

HOW DO CITIZENS SEE THE EUROPEAN UNION?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

▶ HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE EU? THE OPINION OF EUROPEAN CITIZENS

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

CITIZENS FACING “BRUSSELS’ EUROPE”

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS IN BRUSSELS: WHAT MESSAGES?

Virginie Timmerman, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, August 2014

THE INVOLVEMENT OF EU CITIZENS IN THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

Daniel Debomy, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, July 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT GLOBALISATION

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT EURO

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EUROPEAN DEMOCRACY

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

▶ WHAT THE FRENCH TOLD US ABOUT THE EMPLOYEMENT IN THE EU

Video, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, May 2014

EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE EU: NATIONAL SYNTHESSES

Optem network, *Synthesis*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, December 2013/January 2014

EU NO, EURO YES? EUROPEAN PUBLIC OPINIONS FACING THE CRISIS (2007-2012)

Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 90*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, March 2013

DO THE EUROPEANS STILL BELIEVE IN THE EU?

Daniel Debomy, *Studies & Reports No. 91*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, June 2012

MIGRANTS – EUROPEAN STORIES

Frédéric Praud, Florence Brèthes, Hamed Borsali and Kiel, *Comics, Paroles d’hommes et de femmes / Notre Europe*, May 2012

THE CITIZENS OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CURRENT CRISIS

Daniel Debomy, *Policy Paper No. 47*, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute / Fondation Jean Jaurès, November 2011

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